



# **Can you bottle a good relationship? Learning about mentoring in the Talent Match programme**

The Centre for Youth Impact

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## About this report

This report was commissioned by the Big Lottery Fund to support learning about quality mentoring relationships within and beyond the Talent Match programme.

It was written by Philippa Knott, Head of networks at the Centre for Youth Impact.

The Big Lottery Fund is the largest funder of community activity in the UK and uses money raised by National Lottery players to help communities achieve their ambitions. From small, local projects to UK-wide initiatives, our funding brings people together to make a difference to their health, wellbeing and environment. Since June 2004 we have awarded £8.5 billion to projects that improve the lives of millions of people.

Talent Match is one of five major programmes set up by the Big Lottery Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier. Talent Match was created with young people, and they continue to be at the centre of the local strategies being tested in each place. The partnerships bring together employers, education providers and charities to support young people who have been out of education, employment or training, for at least 12 months. Together they provide tailored practical and emotional support to help young people overcome the barriers they face to finding work, from hidden disabilities to homelessness and mental ill-health. The aims of the programme are to:

- Help equip young people with the confidence, experience, resilience and skills to take their first steps towards employment
- Increase the number of young people accessing education and training or finding and staying in work

The Centre for Youth Impact is a community of organisations that work together to progress thinking and practice around impact measurement in youth work and services for young people. Our vision is for all young people to have access to high quality programmes and services that improve their life chances, by enabling embedded approaches to impact measurement that directly inform practice. Our work, therefore, is dedicated to three objectives, together with our expanded networks and other organisations from across the youth sector: curating the debate, building the movement and shaping the future.

We are very grateful for the contributions and leadership from staff and young people at the Talent Match partnerships that drove this project: the Marches, Leicestershire, Leeds City, the North East, the Black Country, Coventry and Warwickshire, Middlesbrough and Sheffield City.

We are also very grateful for the input and guidance of the members of our external project advisory board: Jolanta Astle – Big Lottery Fund, Imy Baker – Careers and Enterprise Company; Eleanor Barnardes – LKMCo; Jonathan Dawson – Princes Trust; Olamide Iyiola – Teach First; Sally Marsh – independent consultant; Suzanne Maskrey – The Brightside Trust; Luke McCarthy – Impetus PEF; Colin McFarlane – Plusone; Isobel Neale – TwentyTwenty; Sarah Pearce – Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR); and Peter Wells – CRESR.

## Executive summary

This report presents a quality framework and findings from a learning project that took place between March 2017 and March 2018. The project explored the supportive relationships between key workers and young people participating in the Talent Match programme. Talent Match is a five-year, £108 million investment by the Big Lottery Fund to tackle youth unemployment. The programme is delivered by cross-sector partnerships in 21 areas across England, supporting young people aged 18-24 furthest from the labour market.

Through the learning project, we explored the commonalities and variations in how mentoring has been delivered and experienced across the Talent Match programme.

The project consisted of:

- a series of kick off meetings and a non-systematic literature review to set context and scope
- a workshop with partnership staff to develop a theory of change around their mentoring practice
- seven focus groups and a series of interviews with a total of 90 Talent Match participants and delivery staff, discussing their experiences of quality mentoring relationships
- advisory group meetings with experts from a range of organisations that deliver or research best practice in mentoring
- a testing period for a first draft of the framework
- a consultation workshop to test and revise the framework
- this final report.

In this project, the term ‘mentoring’ refers to a practice delivered primarily by paid key workers, and towards the intensive end of the support spectrum. The framework presented here aims to provide greater clarity on what the developmental

relationships offered through Talent Match look like, and what helps them succeed. This in turn could feedback into dialogue about what, exactly, mentoring for employability is.

The depth, complexity and potential power of the relationships at the heart of Talent Match was one of the most striking themes from discussions. At their most powerful, mentors play a fundamental role in the life of that young person:

*[His mentor] has probably been the one person that’s been steady, stable in his life. He didn’t trust anyone, he’s never had a friend. I’d say he does now (Staff focus group 1, participant 4).*

The framework that we developed through this project captures quality through *what the young person experiences* as part of a powerful, potentially transformational mentoring relationship, rather than *what the key worker does*.

This approach was a response to very clear messages from the early stages of the fieldwork: that these relationships are based on intuitive responses to individuals, and that they will be as different as the individuals participating in them.

Therefore, we steered away from a formulaic approach to improving quality in these relationships, and recognise that any kind of prescriptive mentoring ‘manual’ risks undermining the connection and intuition that is at the heart of these relationships.

The framework is based on common themes from the fieldwork. It describes a quality mentoring relationship in Talent Match as being one in which the young person feels:

- they have the **power** to shape how they work with their key worker
- they are understood and respected as an **individual**
- like their key worker **cares** about how they’re doing
- able to **turn to their key worker** for support if they need to

- the goals they're setting are **realistic and achievable**
- **motivated and inspired** to achieve those goals
- able to access **practical, relevant help** to achieve those goals.

The framework is designed to support reflection and improvement in mentoring practice within and beyond the Talent Match programme, through a deeper understanding of good quality supportive relationships in intensive one-to-one work with young people aged 18-25, furthest from the labour market.

The framework is intended to be further tested, developed and used:

- by young people, to help them understand the relationships they can expect as part of the programme they are participating in, and feedback on and improve the services they experience
- by delivery teams, to support conversations about how young people are progressing within their programmes and how they might adapt their approach or
- by funders, to learn about how to understand quality in relationship-based programmes and better support these through funding processes and structures
- to prompt further research, into the applicability of this approach and framework elsewhere, to develop tools to support the application and testing of the framework, and to begin to establish the link between quality practice and later outcomes of relationship-based programmes and practice.

## Introduction

The relationship between adult workers or volunteers, and the young people they support, is a fundamental and powerful feature of the Talent Match employability programme<sup>1</sup>. More generally, there is an increasing recognition that public services and socially-focused programmes are at their best when they work through strong, trusting relationships<sup>2</sup>.

This report presents findings from a year-long project commissioned by the Big Lottery Fund and delivered by the Centre for Youth Impact, working with a range of Talent Match partnerships. Through this project we asked:

- what does an effective mentoring relationship between young person and key worker look like in the context of this intensive employability programme?
- how can we improve and sustain intensive supportive relationships in this and future programmes?

The Centre for Youth Impact, the Big Lottery Fund and the Talent Match partnerships view this project as part of a journey to understanding what quality looks like in professional, supportive relationships.

We also want to drive change in how these are prioritised and supported to thrive in social programmes: nebulous, unique to individuals and critically important as these relationships are.

## The Talent Match programme

Talent Match is a five-year, £108 million investment by the Big Lottery Fund to tackle youth unemployment. The programme is being delivered by cross-sector partnerships in 21 areas across England, and supports young people aged 18-24 furthest from the labour market, including those who are completely outside of the benefits, work and training system and facing severe barriers to gaining the skills they need to get into work.

Talent Match was created with young people, and they continue to be at the centre of the local strategies being tested in each place. The partnerships bring together employers, education providers and charities to support young people who have been out of education, employment or training, for at least 12 months. Together they provide tailored practical and emotional support to help young people overcome the barriers they face to finding work, from hidden disabilities to homelessness and mental ill-health. The aims of the programme are to:

- Help equip young people with the confidence, experience, resilience and skills to take their first steps towards employment
- Increase the number of young people accessing education and training or finding and staying in work.

The Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University and its partners are conducting an impact evaluation across the whole programme, and each partnership is commissioning and carrying out its own local evaluation and learning activities. SHU have developed a Common Data Framework for Talent Match, which provides the structure and tools for the collection of common impact and monitoring data across all of the partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes et. al. (2017)

<sup>2</sup> Green et. al. (2015)

## The learning project

Early in 2017, Talent Match staff identified mentoring as one of the most widely used, and important, mechanisms in their work with young people. Since then, they have been supporting this project, to bring together learning on this theme across the partnerships.

Mentoring is already a significant focus within Talent Match evaluation activity, both at a national level and in local/partnership work<sup>3</sup>. The scale at which mentoring is used throughout Talent Match programmes gives us a valuable opportunity to learn more about how it is delivered and experienced across a range of locations and settings, and to build a more coherent picture of core features of effective practice.

The mentoring learning project aimed to:

- help partnership staff understand what they have in common and what varies across their delivery of mentoring, and how they associate this with effectiveness, to support local reflection and evaluation
- support a legacy from Talent Match, and ensure that lessons learnt about effective practice in relationship-based work reach the wider youth and employability sectors.

In order to achieve the above, we have been working with the Talent Match partnerships to develop a draft quality framework that:

- provides a shared language for the practices of the range of professionals who work one-to-one with young people to overcome barriers and move towards work
- distinguishes what is 'core' to a good, supportive developmental relationship, from what could be 'flexed' (potentially

depending on the setting or outcome being pursued)

- is specific about what 'good' looks and feels like in the relationship between key worker and young person – not just how that relationship is set up and monitored in the context of programme delivery
- is accessible and meaningful to practitioners as well as managers and decision/policy makers and resonates with the experience of young people who have been through the Talent Match programme
- acts as a starting point for practice development that can act as a bridge between Talent Match and future provision.

We intend that the quality framework and narrative around it will therefore be relevant for:

- practitioners: to help them reflect collectively and individually on their mentoring practice
- managers: to help them support practitioners to reflect on and improve the service, and driving up the quality of provision across their organisation
- policy makers/funders: improving understanding of what good quality relationships look like in practice, and how we can invest in these effectively
- young people: There was an original intention for the output of this project to be used as a tool by young people as well as professionals. As the project has progressed, young people have particularly emphasised its potential to help them understand what they can expect from those supporting them, provide feedback on and improve services they are receiving. We would focus on this in any follow up to the current project.

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<sup>3</sup> Barnes et. al (2017)

## Approach

The project has been driven and shaped by eight 'core partnerships', four of whom (Leicestershire, Leeds City, the Marches and the North East) also hosted site visits and are the subject of in-depth case studies. Further information on the core partnerships and the four case studies can be found at Annex A.

Key components of the project are outlined below.

In total, approximately 40 Talent Match participants, 50 mentors, and 10 senior management staff were interviewed or observed as part of this project. When identifying the core partnerships to host site visits, we considered diversity in terms of geography, partnership/organisation size and approach to mentoring. As this was an exploratory project and primarily to stimulate learning and reflection, we did not prioritise aiming for a fully representative sample of the Talent Match partnerships, nor the youth/employability sectors beyond.

Once the partnerships were selected, it was up to the lead contact to identify a range of key workers and young people to participate in the research. They were asked to identify individuals with a range of experiences and approaches, rather than just their 'best cases'.

Focus groups were between four and 12 in size, and lasted between one and two hours. Topic guides were iterated as the project progressed, based on the responses of earlier groups to improve conversation 'flow' and allow probing of emerging themes, but keeping questions open and content consistent as far as possible. The topic guide for the final focus group is attached at Annex B by way of example.

Discussions were recorded and transcripts of the focus groups and observations reviewed and coded according to common themes arising across all of the transcripts. These themes were then drawn together

to provide the first draft of a quality framework, which was tested, deconstructed and re-drafted following face to face workshops and online consultations with 18 self-selecting Talent Match mentors and participants, and the project advisory group.

We are very keen to take the approach and outputs of this work and test and iterate them more systematically, at a larger scale and in more varied settings.

## Key Components of the Project

### April 2017

Core partnerships recruited  
First online consultation workshop

### May

Non-systematic literature review to help scope the project and provide context for in-depth work with partnership staff and participants.

### June

First meeting of mentoring experts advisory group, acting as a bridge between the project and the wider youth sector.

### July

Theory of change workshop with Talent Match managers and key workers to unpick the language around mentoring and common themes and components of the practice

### August - October

Visits to each of the four case study sites to run focus groups with staff and participants, testing themes from the theory of change workshop and scoping workshops, exploring what constitutes quality mentoring, and observing mentoring in practice

### November

Second advisory group meeting  
Second core partnership consultation workshop

### December

First draft of quality framework circulated to core partnerships  
Project leads within the partnerships facilitated discussion sessions with staff and participants and fed back

### January 2018

Consultation workshop with Talent Match staff and participants to agree revised version of framework

### February – March

Report drafted

### April

Framework and report launched

## The terminology of mentoring

As we started to discuss the project with partnerships and to dig into existing literature on mentoring, there was little consensus around exactly what defined the practice – and indeed widespread recognition in the literature of varied, flexible and porous definitions<sup>4</sup>.

It was clear from the literature, and from discussions with the advisory group, partnership staff and participants, that the term ‘mentoring’ relates to a supportive, developmental relationship between two people. Many definitions in the literature reference an imbalanced power dynamic, where the mentor has superior experience or knowledge to the mentee, and a focus on personal development in the context of employability or employment. Definitions usually reference mentoring as sitting within a typology of supportive relationships with young people, alongside coaching, tutoring and counselling, among others<sup>5</sup>.

Although the partnership staff were happy to refer to the one to one work they offer as mentoring, many acknowledged elements of coaching, youth work and advisory support in their provision once tighter definitions were presented. Mentoring was also often assumed in the literature to be voluntary: both on the part of the mentee, and also on the part of the mentor (and so unpaid), while the majority of the Talent Match partnerships offer mentoring that is delivered by paid key workers.

Miller (2002) highlights the risk of taking too broad a definition of interventions such as mentoring: the resultant inability to be specific about what quality looks like in that intervention. The framework produced as part of this project should respond to this, by providing greater specificity on the developmental relationships offered

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<sup>4</sup> Hall (2003), p7

<sup>5</sup> For example, as set out in Teach First (2005) and Miller (2002)

through Talent Match, and what helps them succeed. This in turn could feedback into the dialogue about what, exactly, mentoring for employability is. In the context of this report, mentoring is referred to as a practice delivered primarily by paid key workers, and towards the intensive end of the support spectrum.

## What do we already know about mentoring?

### Impact of mentoring

Establishing the impact of mentoring practices, whether broadly or specifically within Talent Match, was outside the scope of this project. However, this has been the subject of various recent systematic reviews and meta analyses<sup>6</sup>.

The most robust quantitative evidence has been produced in the USA<sup>7</sup>, and has shown a statistically significant (but potentially small) impact on a number of social, emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes<sup>8</sup>.

Getting closer to the relationship between the quality of the mentoring interventions and eventual outcomes ‘achieved’, Rhodes et. al (2006) suggested three processes through which the mentoring experience might have an impact on the young person: enhancement of social and emotional development; improvements in cognitive functioning through conversation; and promotion of positive identity development. Raposa et. al (2016) also explored the interaction between mentors’ experience, characteristics and skills, and ‘risk factors’ in the young person’s life, finding that in some cases the former were able to mitigate the latter in pursuit of sustained, quality relationships.

Many studies of quality in mentoring considered contextual, environmental, and inter- and intra-personal components of the mentoring experience alongside one another. As this project progressed, we focused increasingly on quality in the person-to-person dynamic – and the impact of external factors upon that.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see Shaw, B and Bernardes, E (forthcoming), and Du Bois, D et. al (2011)

<sup>7</sup> Hall (2003), p5

<sup>8</sup> Du Bois et al (2011)

## Existing quality and practice frameworks

Robust evidence on the connection between the components of any existing quality frameworks, outcomes for the young people on those programmes, and overall impact of mentoring as an intervention remains limited, particularly in the UK context. We intended that our framework would suggest some of the 'core', and critical components of the mentoring experience, potentially to be tested at a later date.

Before embarking on creating our own, we reviewed existing quality frameworks developed for mentoring interventions. Many of these relate to programme design, implementation and evaluation:

- Nesta, Teach First and Brightside: [One-to-one support – a collaborative quality framework](#). 2015 (UK)
- Miller: *Mentoring students and young people*. 2002, p254
- The National Mentoring Partnership: [Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring](#). 2015 (US)
- The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation/NCVO: [Approved Provider Status \(accessed 2018\)](#)
- European Mentoring and Coaching Council: [International Standards for Mentoring and Coaching Programmes \(accessed 2018\)](#).

UK youth sector infrastructure bodies such as Ambition and the National Youth Agency also incorporate the importance of one-to-one developmental relationships in their own quality standards, and the Careers and Enterprise company have provided their own guide to the evidence on circumstantial factors to be considered when designing careers advice programmes for schools<sup>9</sup>.

The core partnerships reported that they had little awareness of existing

frameworks at the point of designing their programmes, or that if they had accessed frameworks they did not find them relevant to their setting. The focus of existing frameworks on voluntary mentors was a particular barrier, as most of the Talent Match partners employ their key workers.

In general, we found that existing frameworks focused on programme design, preparation, implementation and evaluation. The gap we intended to plug with this project was a focus on 'what happens in the room', in the context of those other factors.

We found one quality framework that focused specifically on what happens between adult and young person in a supportive relationship: the Search Institute's [Developmental Relationships Framework](#) (2013). Members of the core partnership and mentoring expert advisory groups had not previously come across the Search Institute framework. However, they found it useful in terms of accessibility, clarity and specificity in understanding about what makes the difference within the relationship between mentor and mentee, once the programme has been set up.

## What does mentoring look like?

There might be multiple variables in how mentoring is set up and delivered:

- **Intended outcome:** this could relate to personal and social development (e.g. support to develop self-esteem), work-related (e.g. aspirations or employability), or subject-based (e.g. academic attainment, or developing learning skills)<sup>10</sup>. Talent Match was designed with the expectation that around 20 per cent of young people engaged would enter sustained employment, due to the multiple and complex challenges faced by the target

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<sup>9</sup> Careers and Enterprise Company (2017)

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<sup>10</sup> Miller (2002)

group. Employment is specified as a target outcome of the programme, but progression and personal development is equally valued and those who do not enter employment should also be supported to develop and move closer to work. In practice, Talent Match delivery staff will place emphasis on both employability and personal development, and there is often significant overlap between the two.

- **Age/status of mentor:** mentors might be peers, near-to-peers or older (and/or senior in hierarchical or employment status) to their mentee. The design of Talent Match and nature of the target group means that mentors are likely to be near-to-peer or older than mentees.
- **Employment status of mentor:** paid or voluntary. Carrad (2002) maintains that mentors are by definition voluntary<sup>11</sup>. Though some partnerships use volunteers to support delivery, mentors on the Talent Match programme are typically paid key workers, albeit most bring the personal motivation and investment in the work that a volunteer might.
- **Power dynamic between mentor and mentee:** In a typical/traditional mentoring relationship, mentors are likely to be superior to the mentee in terms of experience, knowledge and ‘power’ within the relationship – based on their experience in the sector of interest to the mentee. Talent Match provision might be unusual in the context of the wider mentoring ‘field’, in that mentors are employed on the basis of their skills (including empathy and ability to relate to young people) and training, rather than a fit between their own career path and the aspirations of the young people they

are working with. This potentially shifts power back towards the young person, in comparison to more traditional mentoring relationships. There is a particular emphasis within Talent Match on the open-endedness of the relationship, and the importance of the mentee setting its direction and tone – consistent with the youth work approach of many of the Talent Match key workers.

- **Matching:** in workplace mentoring, mentees may approach people to mentor them based on their experience in the sector of their interest. In Talent Match, how key workers are matched to participant varies by partnership, but may be done on the basis of geography, capacity, specific interests, or a more intuitive sense of personality ‘fit’.
- **Duration and resource available:** mentoring is typically a sustained relationship. Mentoring relationships in Talent Match are at the longer end of the spectrum, usually lasting between one and two years<sup>12</sup>.
- **Setting:** Mentoring could potentially take place in a range of physical settings – schools, community centres, public settings such as cafes or libraries; employment support services, or private spaces such as the mentee’s own home. Talent Match staff described using a range of settings for their work, depending both on resource and space available, and their judgement as to what environment might help participants feel most comfortable.

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<sup>11</sup> Carrad, L. (2002) cited in Miller, A (2002), p26

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<sup>12</sup> Barnes et. al (2017)

## Mentoring in Talent Match

Research carried out by the CRESR as part of the Talent Match national evaluation noted a 'spectrum' along which the relationship between key worker and participant might progress: from supportive, holistic 'youth worker' approaches (typically established at the outset), through to the more directive 'careers advisor' support (to which the relationship might progress once trust established and the young person begins to move closer to work)<sup>13</sup>.

The CRESR model provided the starting point for this project, which needs to consider the nature of quality in both the 'general' supportive holistic relationship, and the 'specific' objective of supporting progression towards employment.

### Applying theory of change to mentoring in Talent Match

The outcomes of mentoring are both much-discussed (in academic literature and by Talent Match partnerships themselves) and very broad. It is common to cite a plethora of outcomes from mentoring, but difficult to map in a specific and evidence-based way the important individual components of the mentoring experience, and how they might lead to specific outcomes.

Therefore, we used the principles and objectives of Theory of Change as a starting point for analysing knowledge about practice and effectiveness, but focused on eliciting:

- a) the contexts in which mentoring takes place ('contextual variables'), and
- b) precisely how mentoring takes place within Talent Match, and how it is experienced by the young person (the 'mechanisms of change'<sup>14</sup>).

We took this approach in as an alternative to beginning by identifying aims/outcomes and working backwards to activities, as in a conventional theory of change workshop. This was with the aim of pinpointing exactly what was likely to be causing change within the programme, and what it looks like when this is happening well.

We identified the following ways in which the contexts for mentoring might vary, specifically across the Talent Match partnerships:

- numbers of young people an organisation works with
- size of caseload per mentor
- venue of sessions
- duration of sessions
- duration of mentoring relationship (including whether open-ended or fixed period)
- training / qualifications expected of, or offered to mentors
- format (face-to-face, phone, virtual, group/one-to-one)
- cost/resource available per person
- stated objective of mentoring session and wider mentoring relationship
- organisation's core business/other provision being delivered.

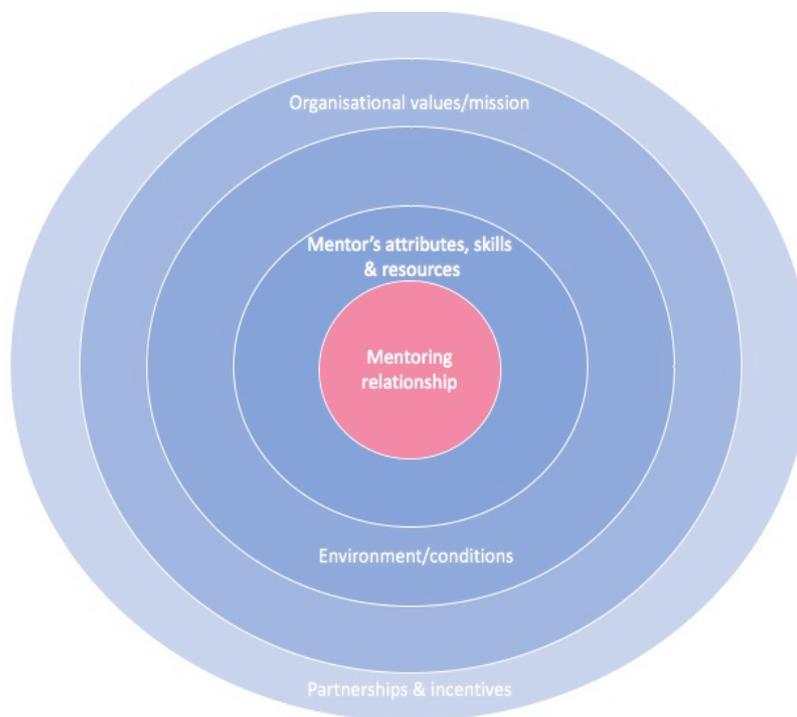
These contextual variables are largely dictated by the circumstances of the Talent Match partnership. Such external influences might include resources and premises available; the organisation's history and existing mission; and partnerships and commissioning conditions – rather than deliberate decisions made either by management staff or mentors in order to achieve certain outcomes or quality programmes.

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<sup>13</sup> Barnes, S-A et. al. (2017)

<sup>14</sup> Noble, J. (2017)

These contextual variables can be considered in terms of their proximity to – and influence on – the mentoring relationship:



The outer (blue) rings determine how the mentoring relationship is designed, funded, monitored and evaluated – all influences on the relationship itself; and the inner core, ‘what it is’, in the room, between mentor and young person. The emphasis of this project is on this quality relationship established between key worker and young person, and affecting the factors in the outer blue rings is less directly in the control of the mentor once the relationship is established. However, it is worth noting that project participants felt that the following factors in the outer rings may be particularly likely to impact on the quality of the relationship at the core: organisational values/mission; the mentor’s attributes and skills; and the resources available to them.

### Mechanisms of change

Within the context of these wider variables, the features of the relationship between mentor and mentee sit at the ‘heart’ of the mentoring experience.

We used the elements presented in the [Search Institute Framework of Developmental Relationships](#) as a starting point for discussion. The Search Institute framework sets out the following elements as being fundamental to any developmental relationship between a young person and an adult ‘that is important in their lives’:

- expressing care
- challenging growth
- provide support
- sharing power
- expanding possibilities<sup>15</sup>.

We presented the Search Institute framework during the early scoping meetings as a potential basis for the current project, and compared participants’ own views on what made a difference in mentoring relationships with the content of the Search Institute framework. There was a significant amount

<sup>15</sup> Search Institute (2013)

of overlap. The partnership staff felt that with some linguistic and presentational tweaks (to adapt to the UK context, an older target group, and the employability-specific intended outcomes of the Talent Match programme), it was a useful starting point for capturing what they felt made the difference in the room – the ‘mechanisms of change’ within mentoring. We suggest that much of the content of the framework that we developed as part of this framework can be related back to the content of the Search Institute’s work.

Over the course of fieldwork, contradictions emerged about what mentors ‘should do’, or the ‘type of person’ they should be. There was, however, greater consensus about the type of relationship they were able to build with the participant – a common dynamic between them, rather than a formula for the type of person that either might be. As the project progressed, we began increasingly to focus on what we’d expect the mentors to help young people experience.

## Scope

The theory of change process revealed multiple factors that have an influence on the impact of mentoring practice.

Acknowledging those factors allowed us to refocus on the scope of this project: unpicking the ‘black box’ of the relationship between mentor and Talent Match participant that is at the heart of the Talent Match experience.

## Framework context

### Fitting frameworks to relationships

The depth, complexity and potential power of the relationships at the heart of Talent Match was one of the most striking themes from discussions. At their most powerful, mentors play a fundamental role in the life of that young person:

*[His mentor] has probably been the one person that's been steady, stable in his life. He didn't trust anyone, he's never had a friend. I'd say he does now (Staff focus group 1, participant 4).*

Mentors viewed their ability to create meaningful, strong relationships with the young people they support as key to progression: towards employment, but also more generally.

The nature of the relationship was described in comparison to others encountered by the young person. The mentors' approach was often contrasted with rushed and impersonal experiences with Jobcentre Plus advisers, and compared with the closer, more fundamental relationship one might experience with a parent, close relative or friend (though many were uncomfortable with a direct comparison, emphasising the importance of professional boundaries).

Talent Match participants may have had limited, or complicated past experiences of these positive, 'fundamental' relationships, making the mentoring relationship all the more important.

*In a way [my mentor] is the father I never had. I get along with my dad sometimes, but my parents have never supported anything that I want to do (interview 1, programme participant).*

When required, the Talent Match mentor has the ability to 'walk alongside' the young person, whatever they are going through. They may become one of a small number of people the participant trusts to

help them – making that help more likely to be received and acted upon.

Scepticism at whether any framework could capture this in a meaningful way was another strong theme in discussion:

*I think a lot of it, a good chunk of it just comes to us, because that's what we're about. I'm struggling with [this discussion] because most of this stuff is just a personality trait within us (SFG2, participant 3)*

Mentors were resistant to the idea that these relationships could be scrutinised too closely – or the output of doing so used for anything practical. They preferred instead to describe quality mentoring as about being *the right personality* (SFG1, P2), so it followed that *if you want good mentoring, get good mentors* (SFG1, participant 2).

This scepticism was rooted in an awareness that that this type of work is, 'about people' and 'intuitive'.

Many suggested that the ability to mentor effectively is innate, and cannot be learnt or 'created' in someone who is not already that way inclined. The importance of intuition and the ability to respond in the moment was heavily emphasised by mentors. That Talent Match has allowed mentors to 'be themselves' and respond to the person and situation in front of them is one of the most valued aspects of the programme.

### Rationale for the framework

According to partnership staff involved in the project, good mentoring means reacting in the moment to the young person in front of you, not about following a process built outside the room.

The importance of responding in the moment, to each individual young person, directly undermines the idea of a prescriptive mentoring 'manual'. However, existing research and site visit findings lent themselves to some clear principles upon

which a quality mentoring relationship might be based. So, rather than aim for an exhaustive list of *what mentors should do*, we increasingly aimed to understand quality through *what the young person might experience* as part of a powerful, potentially transformational mentoring relationship.

Presenting the framework in this way lends itself to light-touch, low-stakes feedback processes that would allow mentors/organisations to build an understanding of how young people are experiencing their work together, and develop their approach accordingly. It also ensures a focus on how the young person feels, rather than what the mentor does. This focuses attention on the mentor's ability to respond intuitively and according to the young person's needs, and away from a tick box or formulaic approach to shaping the mentor's behaviour.

It is not always the case that a relationship of the intensity implied by the framework is necessary or appropriate, even in the Talent Match context. This depends on what the young person is bringing to the room, their context, their needs and their receptivity to support. Staff interviewed emphasised the potential for participants to engage with support, disengage then re-engage:

*Sometimes he [TM participant] is like, I don't want to see you for a few months, because he needs to blow off some steam...I don't want to meddle and there's some mutual respect. But if he's ready then let's play ball, we'll start moving forward (interview 3, key worker).*

The best that mentors could do was make low-key offers of support should the participant want to take it up; and allow participants to respond as and when worked for them.

The framework presented here emerged out of conversations about how to support those who had deeper or more complicated needs (so not seen as 'job ready', and not necessarily seeing themselves as employable); lacked

supportive, positive relationships elsewhere in their lives; and had a level of receptivity to this type of support. It is important to note that this does not represent all young people entering employment programmes, and so a key characteristic of good mentors is the ability to identify the right level of support required, and to react deftly to the behaviours of the young person in front of them.

Participants in this project often said: 'it takes two to tango' – the mentors create the opportunity (deploying any combination of skills/attributes/activities), and the participants bring their receptivity to any supportive relationship and views on how they want to work with their mentor. The framework below thus describes the experience of intensive supportive relationships between paid workers and young people, in which young people have voluntarily chosen to engage and stay engaged.

## A 'quality experience' framework for paid, intensive employability mentoring in Talent Match

When working with my key worker, I feel....	For example, my key worker...
1. I have the power to shape how we work together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...allows me to determine whether we work together at all, what we do, and at what pace</li> <li>...has ideas for what might help me, but doesn't impose their own agenda</li> <li>...doesn't allow external pressures or targets to affect how they work with me</li> </ul>
2. Understood and respected as an individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...doesn't make assumptions about who I am and what I need, but notices and responds to what I say</li> <li>...doesn't allow any of their own preconceptions to affect how they work with me</li> <li>...allows me to share whatever feels relevant and important in my life</li> <li>...connects with me by showing an interest in the things I care about</li> </ul>
3. Like my key worker cares about how I'm doing**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...is interested in me and remembers what's going on in my life</li> <li>...takes time to learn more about what we discuss in our meetings</li> <li>...is a consistent and stable presence</li> </ul>
4. I can turn to my key worker for support if I need to***	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...is approachable and kind</li> <li>...is someone I feel able to call on for help, if I need it</li> <li>...supports me to be independent and not rely on them too much</li> <li>...would speak up for me in negotiations with other services and authorities, if I ask for this</li> <li>...would help me work out how to manage relationships with my family and friends, if I ask for this</li> </ul>
5. That I'm setting goals that are realistic and achievable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...supports me to explore my own ideas and set realistic goals to move forward</li> <li>...supports and challenges me</li> <li>...is honest</li> </ul>
6. Inspired and motivated to achieve these goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...believes in my ability to achieve my goals</li> <li>...inspires me in our work together, and to go on to achieve my goals</li> </ul>
7. Able to access practical, relevant help to achieve these goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...actually does things to help – it's not just talk</li> <li>...shares their knowledge about employment, CVs and job applications</li> <li>...will help out with whatever activities feel relevant and will go above and beyond to help me make progress</li> <li>...can put me in touch with people if I need more help</li> <li>...can help me access funding for useful things like travel costs and interview clothes</li> <li>...explores opportunities alongside me</li> </ul>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ALWAYS:</b>            ...acts in my interests            ...acts within clear professional boundaries</p>

\*\*Within limits: some mentors emphasised the importance of demonstrating 'genuine' care; others emphasised the importance of maintaining professional boundaries by not getting personally invested

\*\*\*Within limits: some mentors emphasised the need to be there 'no matter what'; others emphasised concern about creating dependency or risking work/life separation

## Framework content: what's the story?

The fields of the framework were developed by coding the transcripts from interviews, focus groups and observations with Talent Match staff and participants, which were all based on open ended questions about mentoring practice. The codes were drawn from the most commonly emerging themes, which were summarised from the point of view of the young person, using language as close to verbatim as possible. The first draft of the framework was circulated to the partnerships for discussion and testing locally, before a workshop with 20 staff and participants, at which the content and language was reviewed and revised.

The fields of the framework could also be mapped onto the original Search institute framework headings.

To take each field of the framework in turn:

### 1. ... I have the power to shape how we work together

*Relates to<sup>16</sup>: share power*

This spoke to one of the most important principles in youth work – the power of the participant being able to lead and shape the relationship, and the direction and content of what mentor and participant do together<sup>17</sup>. This requires the mentor being genuinely open to what the participant brings on the day, and respectful of their autonomy and agency. One Talent Match participant valued that:

*Here it's all freedom of choice, you don't even have to come in if you don't want to. I do – I'd be stupid not to (Young people's focus group, participant 1)*

And another:

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<sup>16</sup> Suggested related Search Institute framework fields included in italics

<sup>17</sup> National Youth Agency (2004)

*[It's my] decision – they say take your time, they don't force it, like the Jobcentre (YPPG2, P2).*

### 2. ...understood and respected as an individual

*Relates to: express care*

This was a particularly strong theme that came through from participants, who contrasted their experience of Talent Match provision with other services that they had encountered. This was symbolised in the minds of participants by key workers doing as much listening as talking, and interacting with them as a whole person rather than being overly motivated by the employment outcome, or driven by a need to hit targets or fit the interaction into a tight timescale. One mentor felt that:

*It's all in getting to know the individual, building a bond by whatever means necessarily, whether it be having a laugh with them, having a genuine interest as to who they are, where there at, what they want – from that then read the situation (SFG2, P2).*

This was frequently and clearly reflected from the perspective of the participant:

*[My key worker] listened, it's like he understands (Interview 2, young person).*

### 3. ...like my key worker cares about how I'm doing

*Relates to: express care*

Talent Match participants and staff alike disagreed on how far this should go. Many noted that an innate and genuine ability to care about participants' welfare was essential to effectiveness in the mentoring relationship:

*[My colleagues] really care about young people. There's a real passion, desire to bring them on. That's why they get such a good response (SFG1, P5).*

And this was corroborated in the young people's discussion groups:

*It's so nice to know that someone personally cares about you, rather than just being a number... (SFG1, P5).*

In discussion around the first draft of the framework, others were mindful of the potential for this to mean that the work strayed beyond professional boundaries, or affected the key worker's own wellbeing beyond the working day.

#### **4. ... I can turn to my key worker for help if I need to**

*Relates to: provide support*

This theme derived from a recognition of the breadth of issues that mentors support young people to work through; and that while employability was the overarching objective of the programme, key workers needed to be ready to work with young people holistically.

One mentoring session observed involved the key worker sitting on hold to a DWP helpline for over 20 minutes, and then helping the young person navigate benefit and housing websites. The keyworker helped the young person keep track of her passwords, and supported her to push for resolution when their phonecall was answered. The young person said later:

*There was so much going on, it was overwhelming, I couldn't get my head around it all. She was so good (I2, YP1).*

The support that key workers offered to participants was responsive to need and hugely varied, including:

*Spending a morning mopping a hotel floor with someone, because they won't mop the floor unless they've got someone there with them to do it (SFG1, P2)*

And even:

*We've taken food parcels to the family (SFG3, P2).*

In the consultation workshop, participants were keen to recognise that personal

discussions and more 'intense' support particularly should be led by the young person and not forced upon them by the mentor. Many mentors saw young people 'opening up' to them about issues in their life more broadly as a sign that the relationship was strengthening:

*I still cannot put my finger on it, where the trust comes from...but after a couple of weeks they'll come and tell you anything (SFG3, P4).*

*The relationship is just vital – knowing they've got someone to phone (I1, KW1).*

#### **5. ...that the goals I'm setting are realistic and achievable**

*Relates to: challenge growth*

Mentors described working with participants who stated ambitions that seemed unrealistic, it's not about saying 'yes of course, you can do anything you want', but it's also not about crushing that:

*I had one [young person] saying they wanted to be an astronaut...I'd say you left school with one GCSE, you're probably not going to do that straight away, but it indicates an interest in science, technology, so you can start looking at those options with them, rather than saying 'you're never going to do that (SFG3, P1).*

It was clear from comments that challenge needed to be carefully balanced with support, and 'belief in me'. One participant described the impact of this:

*...she was using [the moment] to turn it around and make me see a little better, and make me think oh, I can actually do that. It quite like that actually because no-one's really done that for me, really. She's really lovely (SFG1, P5).*

Mentors felt that best practice was to be able to help the participant explore what was behind their aspiration, what their motivations and interests were, and how they could positively, confidently identify

practical steps towards a job or training that they would find engaging.

## **6. ...inspired and motivated to achieve these goals**

*Relates to: challenge growth*

The ways in which mentors 'inspired' young people were as varied as the people being described – but that it was both an experience that mentors were aware of creating, and young people of experiencing, was consistently clear:

*The project is about employability, but I think mentoring is about being a role model and inspiring them. I've done this, you can do this. For me it's making them believe that they can do it (SFG 1, participant 6).*

## **7. ... I can access practical, relevant help to achieve these goals**

*Relates to: expand possibilities*

This was the theme most consistently and strongly emphasised by young people in discussions – particularly in the early stages of the mentoring relationship. When asked what initially drew them to working with their mentor, they often said, 'help with my CV', 'money to get to job interviews', or 'tips to get into the career that I wanted'. It was when probed, or reflecting on the relationship as a whole that they recognised and valued the content of the other fields of the framework.

## **Underpinning all this: I feel that my mentor: and acts within clear professional boundaries; and acts in my interests**

These two actions were included because they recurred throughout the discussion of each of the themes.

Focus group participants felt that none of the fields above are valid unless the mentor carries out all of their actions within professional boundaries (such as

caring without intruding in the young person's personal life without their invitation or beyond what it'd take to achieve the objective of the joint work); and in the interests of the young person.

Regarding professional boundaries, one of the biggest variations in practice concerned out of hours working, and exactly how far 'above and beyond' should go. One mentor reported:

*I get text messages at 12 at night, saying 'I got an interview tomorrow, shall I wear this, what shall I wear, and little things like that make a difference (SFG 1, participant 7).*

But another felt it important to:

*tell mine from the outset, my phone will be on 8am-6pm Monday to Friday. If they've got an interview on a Saturday morning I'll turn it on and give them a good luck text. Or if I've got appointments on a Monday morning I'll turn it on Sunday night and remind them. It's just a common sense approach – I don't want them ringing at the weekend (SFG3, P1).*

## So what, and where next?

Good mentoring as the framework above attempts to describe, cannot happen in isolation. Discussion throughout the project confirmed that this requires the right combination of:

- values, addressed primarily through recruitment
- skills and expertise, addressed primarily through training, and a thorough understanding of what quality looks like
- a setting that is conducive to values and skills being developed and demonstrated. This might include alignment of individuals' values with organisational mission and culture, access to appropriate space and time to prepare and debrief, appropriate emotional support from/beyond colleagues, and a strong team culture that allows key workers to support and challenge one another in turn – as tackled by many existing frameworks for quality in mentoring
- access to resources to back up conversations with practical, tailored help
- programmatic freedom and flexibility, allowing individual key workers to use their personal and professional skills to evaluate and respond to the person in front of them in the moment
- data, reporting and accountability mechanisms that aligned to, and reflect upon, a relational way of working.

Additionally, there is little chance that a framework in isolation will stimulate change how relationships are understood, prioritised and supported in the context of programme design, commissioning and delivery. Therefore, we are also using project to raise some of the bigger questions about how we can lead change

to value and improve these crucial supportive relationships.

## Next steps

The findings from this project could be used as a starting point for better understanding, interrogating and improving supportive relationships that young people encounter through services and programmes.

This could be by maintaining and developing the framework as a tool for gathering feedback on programmes for reflection and action by programme teams; incorporating into training and development materials, and longer term, data collection to begin establishing links between relationship/programme quality, and longer term impact and outcomes of that work.

These suggestions are detailed on the following page.

Area	Actions
<b>Feedback/participant voice</b>	...offer the framework to partnership staff and youth advisory councils, with the suggestion that it is shared at the outset and/or 3-month point, and at final review, to allow participants to understand what they can expect from their mentor/key worker
<b>Feedback/participant voice</b>	...develop feedback metrics to allow young people to feedback more consistently/robustly to their mentor, to inform future staff development/organisational training
<b>Service improvement</b>	...share with partnership staff to support team reflection sessions with the question – how closely do we think this matches the experiences that participants should be having on our programme? Which participants is it particularly relevant for? What more can we do to improve what we offer?
<b>Training / CPD</b>	<p>...integrate into local/regional training programmes with the question ‘how can we use this to interrogate and improve the programmes we’re offering?’</p> <p>...review relevant training / qualifications (youth work, Information Advice and Guidance and employability practitioners), exploring the feasibility/demand for a common language across professions about the importance of relationships, common understanding of how to do them well</p>
<b>Recruitment</b>	...use as source material for recruitment processes. Explore how values-based recruitment can become systematic rather than intuitive
<b>Funding / commissioning</b>	<p>...use the learning from this project to support funders to understand what quality might look like in supportive relationships, and how they can create the conditions to enable this</p> <p>... learn more about where commissioners look to understand best practice when considering new programmes / funding streams in this kind of work? What role could a framework like this play in future? What would incentivise them to take it up?</p>
<b>Further research and policy</b>	<p>...prioritise learning about what enables quality relationships to flourish. Lead change in use social programmes to better provide open-ended, flexible, intensive relationships for those who need them</p> <p>...Lead change in use of social programmes to better provide open-ended, flexible, intensive relationships for those who need them.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	...develop metrics and a database to refine test the statistical validity of the frameworks’ fields, and their potential to be predictive of programme impact and outcomes

## Summary

This project has explored what good quality mentoring looks like in the moment, as experienced by the participants, in a large, intensive employability programme delivered across England.

We were interested in the ‘mechanisms of change’, or what it is that enables the young person to make progress with their life in a way that is meaningful to them. This, combined with a resistance to ‘codify’ this intensive, relationship-based work, led us to frame this from the perspective of

the experience of the young person, with the theory that if a young person’s experience includes these features, and they experience it at the right time, they are more likely to feel able and supported to develop and make progress in their lives.

We intend to take this learning and work out how it might apply in other settings and future programmes, and strengthen a movement of organisations committed to understanding and supporting quality in relationships for social development.

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## Annex A: Core partnerships and case studies

The Talent Match partnerships vary considerably both in terms of scale (the number of partners involved), the background of the lead partner (whether in youth work, general infrastructure, a national provider or consortium), and delivery approaches.

The ‘core partnerships’ shaping and contributing to the project were:

- Black Country (lead organisation: Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council). Five hubs, four key partners, 50+ additional delivery partners and host organisations.
- Coventry and Warwickshire (lead organisation: Warwickshire CAVA). Seven organisations in partnership but only Warwickshire CAVA deliver. Also commission through a fluid framework of 23 providers for specific requirements
- Leeds City (lead organisation: Your Consortium). 26 delivery partners
- Marches (lead organisation: HVOSS). No other delivery partners.
- Middlesbrough (lead organisation: Princes Trust). Four delivery partners.
- North East (lead organisation: the Wise Group). 12 partner organisations, then a range of specialist providers – 50+ in total.
- Sheffield City (lead organisation: Sheffield Futures). 16 partner organisations plus employers and strategic group members
- Leicester city and county (lead organisation: Princes Trust). Eight delivery partners.

The Marches, Leicester, the North East and Leeds City were the four partnerships that hosted site visits and nominated staff members and Talent Match participants for interviews, focus groups and observations. A case study of the context and practice of mentoring is provided for each of these four partnerships below.

The case studies reveal few significant differences between partnerships in how organisations supported their staff to build relationships with participants. In many cases, relationships between key worker and young person seem to be determined more by each individual’s own experience and approach than organisational policy, and, in most cases, their largely ‘instinctive’ adherence to the principles set out in the framework in the main report. There was strong consistency in how they described quality assurance and standardisation in relationships like these (all but impossible to achieve), and the core features of these relationships.

These case studies are drawn from organisational background documents, interviews, focus groups and observations, and information provided by key contacts at each partnership.

### Case study: The Marches

#### Partnership context

Marches Talent Match operates across the very rural areas of Herefordshire and in the New Town of Telford. It is one of the four smaller Talent Match partnerships. Delivery of the programme is by a single organisation: Hereford Voluntary Organisations’ Support Service (HVOSS). The HVOSS team work across two hubs (in Hereford and Telford), with outreach work in the market towns and more rural areas. Across both sites, there are approximately 100 participants actively engaged per year. The staff team consists of two

team leaders, seven youth engagement workers, an administrator and programme manager.

Both the Herefordshire and Telford programmes are delivered by a small, close team who are able to support one another, step in for one another, and work together to informally but effectively problem solve. The size of the partnership means that all staff are able to get to know all participants actively engaged on the programme in their area at any one time. In the words of a participant, ‘everyone’s really nice, and there are enough people that you can get to know them all’.

### **Referral and matching processes**

Young people are referred to the Marches Talent Match programme by the local Job Centre Plus staff, the local work and health programme providers, other support service providers, from other programmes run by HVOSS, via outreach work and informal referrals from existing participants.

New referrals are met by the team leader, who will spend time getting to know their interests, issues and barriers, and ascertaining whether they meet the Talent Match criteria. They then allocate them to one of the key workers.

The team feel that matching, and the ‘fit’ between young person and mentor is very important, though it happens quite informally. The team leader will assign the young person to a key worker based on their ‘sense’ of who that young person will best work with. Personality fit, taking geography into account, and the need for outreach/off-site visits are all considered factors. The team also emphasised how they work together to reassign participants to a different key worker, if it feels like the participant is ‘stuck’ and might benefit from a fresh perspective or different approach. Each team member has a variety of skill sets, preferred working styles, and differing range of experiences and are enabled to work collaboratively and complimentary.

### **Mentoring practice**

One to one meetings take place based on where the young person is ‘at’, what sort of change they are going through and what they want to achieve. The team felt it important that they didn’t push participants into more intensive engagement if they weren’t ready for that – but stayed in touch as far as possible between times, often using social media to do so. They deliver through a balance of offering support for wellbeing, mentoring personal development and coaching towards employability.

One-to-one mentoring takes place informally as an offshoot of the personal and social development group work that is part of the Marches core programme offer. It also happens more formally as part of employability workshops and occasionally within drop-in sessions.

Mentoring is delivered as part of the paid youth involvement worker role, but has also emerged voluntarily between peers particularly out of group work sessions – including more recently, ‘older’ TM participants supporting a group of Syrian refugees on their English programme. The team have recently trained a set of peer mentors, and made references to ‘spotting’ young people they were working with who would be well suited to peer mentoring. They were very positive about the strength of relationships that developed through the group sessions and resultant growing community, and are keen to learn more about peer mentoring practice and how they could support their participants to deliver this, for the benefit of both mentee and mentor.

The team felt that the atmosphere in the building was very important, and they'd thought carefully about use of space and keeping an informal feel in the office. In addition to their assigned mentor young people often build strong relationships with support staff around, who make an active effort to get to know young people on site and establish trust.

When talking about the specifics of mentoring practice, staff felt that 'it's all in getting to know the individual, building a bond with them through whatever means necessary'. The team placed heavy emphasis on the importance of a trusting relationship, that would look different each time depending on what the young person brought to the interaction. The key priority for the mentor was therefore to be able to pick up on small cues and respond in the moment, and understand when to challenge and when to support. They felt that there was no 'formula' for this, that doing mentoring work well required a combination of instinct and drawing on experience, and that it would be difficult to capture how to do mentoring effectively in any kind of manual or instructional method of learning.

### **Learning, development and understanding quality**

Learning, development and improvement of the programme centres on the fact that the teams are small and have close working relationships, which allow them to reflect and learn together through team meetings and case reviews. Learning takes place quite informally but the team feel that it is effective that way. When talking about test and learn, they described it as 'Come up with an idea, run with it, if it works, cool, if it doesn't try another one. We review it together to figure out if it worked – and the behaviour of our participants tells us!'

They emphasised the importance of 'reflection', and being self-critical, in a developmental way'. Reflective sessions are key to team management and development. The team leader is also able to keep an eye on the progress of young people throughout the programme by catching up with them informally around activities and mentoring sessions. This enables the team leader to support the workers to reflect on the participants' progress and further ways that they could be supported.

There was some awareness of training opportunities available, but they had not been taken up at scale or in a particularly structured way. One team member is studying for a degree in child and adolescent mental health, and brings their knowledge to bear on discussions. Others have undertaken distance learning, training days and courses around mental health, resilience, and wellbeing.

### **Case study: Leeds City**

#### **Partnership context**

Your Consortium leads a 17-organisation partnership that delivers Talent Match in the Leeds City region. Collectively, they work with up to 500 young people annually.

Each organisation across the partnership its own specialist focus within the partnerships. Some organisations focusing in on just the one to one relationships with participants (those organisations with 'key worker' status), and then liaise with others such as the Youth Association, who facilitate co-production and youth involvement, and deliver group work and social activities for young people across the whole partnership.

Paddock Community Trust (PCT) is the Leeds City partner that is the subject of this case study. PCT is a learning and support organisation based in Kirklees in Yorkshire that runs a

range of employability support and community outreach funded programmes, and in the Leeds City Talent Match context is a specialist key worker organisation.

### **Referral and matching processes**

The onus is on each individual organisation in the partnership to generate their own referrals. These come via multiple routes, including word of mouth through existing participants, street based outreach work and targeted work with families, and ESF provision. In addition to partnerships' own referrals, Your Consortium also manage a centralised referral process with Jobcentre Plus, where any referrals are routed through Your Consortium and allocated out to partnerships on a geographical basis.

Although organisations generate their own referrals, they will refer participants onto others if they feel a different specialism is required. Partners might specialise in areas of work such as theatre and creative ways of working, specialist housing support, work with young people with disabilities, and refugee young people. Especially now that the programme has been operating for a few years, and is delivered by staff members with significant experience in employability work in the area, referrals are made on the basis of existing relationships between staff, and knowledge built up over time about what different organisations offer.

Once a young person has been referred to PCT specifically, they will be assigned a key worker based on where they live: each key worker within PCT covers a different area of Kirklees. This is because while group work is delivered on site, one to one takes place nearer to home for the participants, with the exception of the first and the final progress reviews, which are conducted on site. If any one member of staff has a disproportionately large caseload, participants will be allocated to another staff member. Reallocation will also happen if staff members feel that the young person's needs would be better met by another mentor.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

Paddock Community Trust have a team of four key workers dedicated to Talent Match, all of whom specialise in maintaining close one to one relationships with participants throughout their time on the Talent Match programme. In addition to key working responsibilities, the contracts and training manager has the overall responsibility of quality assurance and contract management; another staff member oversees the day-to-day delivery of the program including matching participants. The key workers areas of specialism, including coaching methodologies, and housing and benefits knowledge.

### **Mentoring practice**

Every participant experiences one to one mentoring as a core part of the programme in Leeds City Region, alongside group work and peer to peer mentoring.

The relationships begin at PCT with long, in-depth discussion based around the fields in the Common Data Framework<sup>18</sup>. This conversation allows the young people to start exploring where they are, and establish some objectives; and helps the key worker to understand how they can help participants. Key workers usually emphasise that they work completely separately from the Jobcentre, with the intention that participants will talk honestly about their aspirations and progress, and trust can begin to be established between key worker and participant.

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<sup>18</sup> Evaluation and data collection framework developed by Sheffield Hallam University and used across all of the Talent Match partnerships to collect monitoring and impact data

The expectation is then be that participants stays with that key worker for the duration of the Talent Match programme. The key worker guide and support them through a range of activities, unless either side felt that progress was slow, in which case the participant would be assigned to another key worker (with the participant's consent).

### **Learning, development and understanding quality**

An 'annual calendar', coordinated by Your Consortium, sets out the main opportunities for learning and development across the organisations making up the partnership. These opportunities consist of theory of change meetings, local meetings focused on particular issues arising, and caseload management meetings. Your Consortium collect mentoring logs from their partners so that they can monitor outputs and outcomes, and compare the level of support being offered across the partnership. Young ambassadors also run their own calendar of meetings to discuss their views on changes that could be made to the programme.

At PCT specifically, staff are encouraged to provide their own ideas for useful and relevant training, and at the time of writing were considering a locally-run mentoring training course.

In terms of peer learning, the team are 'always talking to each other about how we're getting on, and asking each other for different ideas and ways of working'. It was felt that this was a more effective means of collective learning and development than formal review meetings.

## **Case study: Leicestershire**

### **Partnership structure**

Talent Match Leicestershire is one of five Talent Match partnerships led by the Princes Trust. The Leicestershire partnership consists of the Princes Trust working with seven other organisations, who collectively work with 200 young people annually. Each partnership brings specialist expertise for which they were recruited. There is a focus across the partnership on young people being able to access a network of practitioners, supported by one designated caseload lead who monitor their journey and outcomes.

Access all Areas (AaA), a small geographically-based coaching provider in Melton, is the focus of this case study. AaA provides employability-focused coaching and information, advice and guidance, as well as support to work on media skills and projects. AaA works with between 25 and 30 Talent Match participants at any one time, with around half these being actively engaged.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

Access all Areas is responsible for initial engagement with participants, assessment and ongoing one to one work and reviews. As with four other organisations in the Leicestershire partnership, they deliver intensive one to one support throughout the programme, even when participants are referred onto others for specialist or more focused support.

AaA is run by a single individual, Mark, who works with a team of up to three peer mentors, many of them formerly Talent Match participants, but some referred onto Mark having been picked up by the local council from their own programmes as potential peer

mentors. The peer mentor roles are usually voluntary, but can turn into paid roles where they are performing well and working with participants on an ongoing basis.

Mark also has strong links across the Talent Match Leicestershire network, and prioritises building up close, trusting relationships with participants, so that he can refer them onto others for specific support but remain a point of contact and consistency. His name was mentioned frequently across the partnership by staff members and participants alike as an energetic personality and memorable mentor to work with.

Mark is ‘author and architect’ of the programme offered by AaA, and he prioritises drawing on his own life experience and that of the volunteers while mentoring, feeling that the ‘relevance and gravitas of the programme is greater if it is supported by people with something in their background in common with the participants’.

### **Referral and matching processes**

Participants arrive into Talent Match Leicestershire via self-referrals, external partners, or the partners’ own recruitment processes. In the case of self-referrals and those arriving via external partners, the process is managed and monitored by the Princes Trust as the lead partner. The Prince’s Trust’s documented recruitment process also describes an initial, informal period of dropping into activities and ad hoc conversations, prior to participants formally signing up to the programme.

In the case of AaA, its size means that all participants sit on Mark’s caseload. Referrals to AaA are on a geographical basis due to the rural nature of the area, but Mark prioritises being very visible within the network, and very specific about what he can offer. His current focus is on working with local employers as much as with young people, to ensure they are able to meet participants’ needs and support them to thrive when they do enter work.

### **Mentoring practice**

At Access all Areas, there was a strong sense that coaching was personality-led – about captivating and energising the participants in order to secure their engagement.

Mark emphasises the nature of the people based practice, and felt that it was a feature of the work that sometimes personalities don’t ‘gel’. This becomes pertinent when the mentor starts to ‘push’ the participant, and if a good dynamic is not established by this point (typically the third or fourth session), the working relationship will break down. When this is the case, he is comfortable to refer the participant on, within the partnership if possible or outside it if not.

Mark also operates on the basis that the interaction is ‘only as successful as the receptiveness of the person you’re working with’, and is determined as much by what the participant brings to the relationship as what the mentor does. In line with Mark’s description of the people-based practice, he was clear that ‘you can’t bottle mentoring’, and getting this to work well was as much about inherent abilities and therefore good recruitment, as about training, learning and development.

### **Learning, development and understanding quality**

The Princes Trust have developed materials across the partnership, based on shared experiences of delivery. These draw on the Work Star tool<sup>19</sup> and relate to the journeys of change experienced by participants.

Mark's experience in mentoring meant that his focus currently is on supporting mentors working in other organisations through site visits, observations and feedback – he is currently supporting the training of DWP job coaches, and staff at a local training provider. Observations of his own practice generally take place only as part of contract management processes, or research studies. Critical to his own personal development is gaining experience beyond formal employability mentoring, through training as a psychodynamic therapist and a return to work in the dramatic arts.

He described feedback from clients as being the most useful information for development – as observed and gathered in the moment. As such, he prioritises checking in with clients on whether 'what I'm doing is useful – how are they finding this? And do they like me as a person?'

## Case study: North East

### Partnership context

The Wise Group is the lead partner for the North East partnership, and is also one of ten partners that deliver one to one coaching for participants. Other organisations include a wide range of primarily charitable organisations, including Groundwork, Tomorrow's People, and the Newcastle United Foundation (NUF), who are the focus of this case study. These partners are supported in turn by over 50 specialist organisations, to whom they can refer participants as necessary.

The partnership as a whole is currently has approximately 2,500 participants engaged in the programme, while NUF's current caseload is 77 participants, of whom they are actively working with 51.

Team members found the partnership structure and close working relationships within this hugely valuable, for being able to problem solve and access support beyond organisational boundaries.

### Referral and matching processes

The Wise Group does not run a centralised recruitment or referral process across partner organisations, each of whom is responsible for recruiting in their local areas.

As well as a geographical focus, each organisation also targets different groups of young people – for example, lone parents, people facing homelessness or with unstable housing situations, or people living in isolated rural locations. However, no partner would turn any young person away for not being in their target group. In some organisations, individual mentors are responsible for their own recruitment – and might take a judgement over whether they feel the young person will benefit from the programme and their way of working before signing them up.

NUF's particular focus is on recruiting young males, who represent 66 out of 77 total participants. They advertise a 15-week course, the focus of which is a series of workshops designed to boost skills for work, increase self-esteem and improve physical and mental

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<sup>19</sup> Further information at: <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/using-the-star/see-the-stars/work-star/>

health – with some football specific focus. The location in and connection to Newcastle United Football Club was a clear draw for many participants. Participants are join the programme via courses such as Princes Trust Team and Premier League Works, and direct advertising.

Relationships are initially built through group work, which is supported by at least two members of staff to 15 participants at different stages in their journey, taking into account individuals' needs, and staff members were able to work with smaller groups or take individuals off for one to one conversations as needed.

The caseload allocation is kept flexible and responsive to participants' changing needs. Initially they are allocated randomly, until staff have got to know the participants better. Each participant will also work with all youth coaches as all meetings are held with two youth coaches present.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

The team is led by a community programme manager, and consists of an employability coordinator (caseload of seven), two project officers (caseloads of 30 each), and an additional project officer (caseload of 10) working across other programmes. They are supported by a business network manager, who works with all participants, acting as a bridge to local employers. Once participants are moved into work, the delivery team will maintain contact with both the employer and participant, ensuring that lines of communication remain open in order to deal with any issues.

### **Mentoring practice**

Each partner organisation offers a slightly different model of mentoring. All deliver some combination of one to one and group work, but the emphasis varies between organisations.

At NUF, the coaches build the programme around group courses themselves, with one to one work taking place around group sessions. Coaches will draw on the Sheffield Hallam Common Data Framework fields to as a starting point for conversations with participants, and to understand progress. If the participants are referred in from external partners, the NUF team liaise with them to understand the participant's needs, which helps build relationships.

As with many partners across the wider Talent Match programme, peer mentoring has been naturally emerging from within the participant group. One participant met through fieldwork had been working with the programme for around 18 months and built close relationships with the coaches, while sustaining employment within St James Park itself. He attended group sessions regularly, experiencing an ongoing sense of community from which he benefited from himself, and had starting to be paid by the programme for the benefit and support he was able to offer to other participants.

### **Learning, development and understanding quality**

Across the partnership, coaches share information between themselves about progress and approaches, sometimes through partnership meetings but largely informally. Opinion was divided between individuals in the discussion group as to the value of reflection. Some felt reflecting in order to learn and develop was crucial to doing their job well, while another left it as 'I am who I am'. The lead partner also runs quality spot checks.

NUF staff feel that the following are important to ensuring high levels of quality on their programmes: a lone working policy which means that all one to ones take place with two members of staff present; regularly reviewed safeguarding policies; regular staff observations, by line managers and peers, for quality assurance, a code of conduct, which is produced and agreed upon in collaboration with participants, and the youth coach; and the collect evidence from each sessions in the form of reviews and notes, which is then reviewed within the team and by line managers. This information is then used to inform the content of further meetings with participants.

In terms of development and quality improvement, all youth coaches at NUF attend regular training courses to ensure professional development and are currently attending training set up by the Wise Group Youth Coach Academy, looking at how they can better support participants with a variety of issues such as benefit support, mental health issues and social media preferences. Weekly meetings are also held on a Thursday afternoon to reflect on the week and plan for the following week. At the end of any sessions such as employer site visits and more intensive interventions, the participants are asked to fill out short reflection cards explaining what they enjoyed about the site visit and how it has impacted upon their career plans, whether they would be interested in visits to similar businesses and how to improve the site visits for future sessions.

The team also participate in a dedicated group reflection session, which is run in house, to enable the Foundation to constantly reflect on and improve their delivery. All of this activity is informed by focus groups with participants, which are used to shape the youth coaches' planning and delivery.

## Annex B: Example discussion group topic guide

### Topic guide: mentors

#### Objectives

- To elicit views on what quality looks like in mentoring
- To test views emerging from Theory of Change workshop on what quality looks like in mentoring.

#### S1. Background (10 mins)

- Anyone know anything about the project and why they're here?
- CYI – independent organisation asked by Big Lottery to pull together what has been learnt from Talent Match: to enable staff to learn and improve what they do, and to ensure that future programmes can learn from and incorporate what has been tested and learnt from TM
- We are specifically focusing on the one-to-one work that takes place. We're referring to this as mentoring, though there are lots of different terms used to refer to this one-to-one work, including coaching, counselling and key working. *Check:* Everyone happy to use mentoring? Anything that does or does not particularly resonate about that term?
- FG content used for case studies of how mentoring works in different Talent Match partnerships, and to feed into a tool to help people think about quality in mentoring
- Recording these discussions for my own notes, but no-one else will hear them back. Any quotes used in either of these pieces of work will be anonymised. You can withdraw at any point, without giving a reason.
- [questions/discussion about project generally].

#### S2. Introductions (10mins)

- First name
- Role
- Outline of the one-to-one work are you currently delivering as part of TM. *Prompt:* duration, frequency, continuity of YP/mentor relationship.

#### S2. Quality relationships (30 mins)

I'd now like to dig into what happens 'in the room' with the young people you work with to help them move forward. Take a minute to think about the most effective mentoring relationships that you've experienced.

- What factors are the most important in contributing to an effective mentoring relationship with a young person?
  - What needs to be going on around you?
  - What do you need to be doing?
  - What needs to be happening for the young person? How do they need to turn up to the session?

- What have been the most helpful resources you've had to help you do your job well?
- What has been the most helpful support you've had to help you do your job well?
- Of all the things we've talked about – what are the most critical for a mentoring relationship? Are there things you think could be optional, or change according to circumstance/YP you're working with?
- How do you know if an effective mentoring relationship is taking place?
  - What are you doing in conversation with the young person? How are you feeling?
  - What behaviours do you see in the young person? How are they acting? What do you think they're experiencing?

### **S3. Testing proposed fields of quality framework (30mins)**

[summarise discussion and add in fields from SI framework to separate pieces of paper. SI framework showing on screen].

This summarises research carried out in the US into what effective supportive relationships with young people look like. We would like to do so something similar to capture effective relationships in the Talent Match context.

- What are your reflections on this as a description of a good mentoring relationship?
  - Are there things you want to add?
  - Are there things you'd want to take away?
  - Do some feel more important to you than others? Are there any that are critical? Any that could be optional, or flexible?
  - Taking each in turn: how would you know if each of these were happening? What would you be doing? How would the young person be responding?

### **S4. Wrap up (10mins)**

- Briefly summarise key themes from discussion
- Explain next opportunities to contribute:
  - comment on write-up of case studies and draft framework
  - participate in testing this
  - attend launch
  - stay in touch.

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